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Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANAGU 01383 212229Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
----------076123 212234Z /73
O R 212148Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6103
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAGUA 1383

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, NU, PINS
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH SOMOZA: MARCH 20

REF: MANAGUA 1338

SUMMARY: SOMOZA APPEARS VERY TIERED. HE IS LOOKING FOR SOME HELP FROM THE U.S. TOWARD CALMING DOWN THE COUNTRY. HE IS WORRIED ABOUT THE ECONOMIC SITUATION, THE FSLN, AND OPPOSITION INTRANSIGENCE.
END SUMMARY

1. AMB REQUESTED MEETING WITH SOMOZA TO OBTAIN READING ON SOMOZA'S REACTION TO THE OPPOSITION'S NEW ENUMERATION OF CHANGES NEEDED IN THE COUNTRY (REFTEL) AND URGE CONTINUED ACTION TOWARD ACCOMMODATION. THE LUNCHEON MEETING ON MARCH 20 AT MONTELIMAR LASTED ALMOST FOUR HOURS. AMB FOUND SOMOZA MORE HAGGARD THAN EVER BEFORE AND HIS INITIAL SLOW SPEAKING SUGGESTED HE MAY HAVE BEEN SEDATED.

2. AMB CONGRATULATED SOMOZA ON HIS MARCH 10 PRESS CONFERENCE AND NOTED THAT TWO OPPOSTION LEADERS IN PRIVATE HAD COMMENTED FAVORABLY ON IT. HE URGED SOMOZA TO CONTINUE TO COMMUNICATE HIS WILLINGNESS TO
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BE ACCOMMODATING. SOMOZA SAID HE WOULD CONTINUE.

3. SOMOZA SHIFTED TO COMPLAING THAT THE OPPOSITION DID NOT WANT TO BE ACCOMMODATING BECAUSE THEY BELIEVED THE U.S. WAS COMMITTED TO HIS OVERTHROW. AMB ASSURED HIM THAT WE HAD USED EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO DISABUSE THE OPPOSITION OF THAT IDEA BECAUSE WE DOD NOT WANT THEM TO MAKE ANY DANGEROUS ERRORS. SOMOZA SAID WHAT WAS NEEDED WAS A

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PUBLIC STATEMENT BY THE U.S. THAT HE WAS MOVING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND WE HAD FAITH HE WANTED TO DEMOCRATIZE NICARAGUA. AMB REFERRED TO STATEMENTS FROM WASHINGTON THAT SHOWED WE DID ACKNOWLEDGE PROGRESS AND WERE EVEN HANDED. SOMOZA ASKED HOW ANYONE COULD BELIEVE A PERSON WHO HAD ALREADY BEENELECTED TWICE AND "IS AS SICK AS I AM" COULD WANT TO CLING TO POWER. HE SAID HE JUST WANTS TO GET OUT GRACEFULLY, TO RETIRE, AND TO TRY TO LIVE A FEW YEARS IN PEACE.

4. AMB CONTINUED TO PRESS THE NEED TO MAINTAIN MOMENTUM TOWARD CONVINCING THE OPPOSITION HE WAS SERIOUS AND REFERRED TO THE COUNTER-PROPOSAL OF THE OPPOSITION TO THE ELECTORAL REFORM INITIATIVE. SOMOZA EXPRESSED AGNER THAT THE OPPOSITION WAS BEING UNFAIR, GIVING AS AN EXAMPLE THE PROPOSAL THAT LIFETIME SENATE MEMBERSHIP FOR EX-PRESIDENTS BE ABOLISHED. AMB SUGGESTED SOMOZA COULD ANSWER THE PROPOSALS ON AN ITEM BY ITEM BASIS OR MAKE A GENERAL STATEMENT SUGGESTING SOME OTHER PROPOSALS AS THE BASIS FOR NEGOTIATIONS. AMB ALSO REFERRED TO SOMOZA'S ABILITY TO RECOMMEND CHANGES IN THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM INITIATIVE ON THE ELECTORAL LAW TO ADDRESS THE CONCERN EXPRESSED BY THE OPPOSITION REGARDING THE COMPOSITION OF THE ELECTROAL TRIBUNAL SYSTEM. SOMOZA ALSO SAID HE WAS DEBATING THE TIMING OF HIS PUBLIC REACTION TO THE OPPOSITION'S COUNTER-PROPOSAL. HE SAID HE WOULD PROBABLY HOLD OFF UNTIL HE RETURNED FROM THE U.S. (HE PLANS A HEALTH AND RECREATION TRIP TO MIAMI AND NEW YORK FOR ONE WEEK BEGINNING MARCH 25).

5. SOMOZA'S FRUSTRATION CAME THROUGH IN OTHER STATEMENTS SUCH AS CONFIDENTIAL

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"WHY SHOULD I GIVE IN TO THE OPPOSITION WHEN THEY HAVE NOT EARNED IT"; "I HAVE ALREADY TURNED MY CHEEK, DO YOU WANT ME TO TURN IT AGAIN"; "I ALREADY OFFERED THE MINIMUM BASIS FOR NEGOTIATION IN MY (FEB 26) SPEECH". SOMOZA SAID IT WAS ESSENTIAL TO GET THE COUNTRY CALMED DOWN BECAUSE NICARAGUA WAN'T GETTING ANY INTERNATIONAL LOANS. HE SAID HE HAD TO RESTORE CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT. HE ALSO AGAIN EXPRESSED CONCERN REGARDING FSLN OPERATIONS FROMCOSTA RICA. SOMOZA ALSO LAMENTED THE RECENT FSL KILLING OF GEN PEREZ VEGA SAYING THE FSLN WAS TRYING TO BREAK HIM BY KILLING HIS COLLABORATORS. IN AN ASIDE, SOMOZA SAID HE WANTED THE AMB TO KNOW THAT DURING THE CRISIS LATE AT NIGHT AND ALONE HE HAD BEEN THINKING WHETHER THE TIME HAD ALREADY COME FOR HIM TO STEP DOWN. BUT HE HAD DECIDED HE HAD HIS DUTY TO PERFORM, THAT HE COULD NOT SIMPLY ESCAPE FROM HIS RESPONBIBILITIES.

6. SOMOZA RAISED THE ISSE OF A NOTE PRESENTED TO THE DEPARTMENT REQUESTING CLARIFICATION OF A JOURNALIST'S ARTICLE QUOTING DEPARTMENT SOURCES AS SAYING SOME WANTED TO SEE SOMOZA OVERTHROWN. HE COMPLAINED THERE WAS STILL NO REPLY WHICH HE ASSUMED WOULD HAVE TO DNY THE U.S.G.'S INTEREST IN HIS OVERHROW AND WHICH HE COULD PUBLISH HERE.

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7. ON THE CHAMORRO ASSASSINATION INVESTIGATION, SOMOZA COMPPLAINED THAT PENA (THE ORGANIZER OF THE ASSASSINATION) HAD ONLY MADE STATEE-MENTS INVOLVING THE CUBAN -AMERICANS OF THE PLASMA EXPORTING COMPANY, PLASMAFERISIS, AFTER SOMOZA HAD LET THEM LEAVE THE COUNTRY. AMB ASKED ABOUT AN EXTRADITION REQUEST FOR DR. PEDRO RAMOS, AND SOMOZA SAID THE JUDGE WAS MOVING TOO SLOW. AMB REPLIED THAT IN NICARAGUA NOTHING MOVED FAST UNLESS SOMOZA PUSHED IT. SOMOZA AGREED.

8. AMB RAISED COMPLAINTS NOW CIRCULATING ABOUT IMPEDIMENTS BEING RAISED FOR MANY PROMINENT NICARAGUANS IN OBTAINING EXT VISAS FOR FOREIGN TRAVEL. SOMOZA ACKNOWLEDGED BEING AWARE OF THE COMPLAINTS AND REPLIED THAT THE GON WAS SIMPLY APPLYING THE LAW.

9. COMMENT: SOMOZA APPEARS TO BE TRULY EXHAUSTED BY HIS CURRENT
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PROBLEMS. HE CONTINUES TO HOPE THE U.S. WILL HELP HIM ON THE BASIS OF ACCOMMODATING STEPS HE HAS TAKEN. AT ONE POINT SOMOZA SAID HE DOESN'T MIND IF PRESIDENT CARTER GETS ALL THE CREDIT FOR A DEMOCRATIC OPENING IN NICARAGUAN, THAT IN ANY CASE HE WILL DO ALL HE CAN TO MAKE NICARAGUA A HUMAN RIGHTS SUCCESS STORY. AT THE SAME TIME THE OBSTACLE TO NEGOTIATED CHANGE REMAINS THE OPPOSITION'S OBSESSIVE, BUT HISTORICALLY FOUNDED, DISTRUST OF SOMOZA. FURTHER CONCRETE ACTIONS BY SOMOZA AND TIME ARE NECESSARY FOR THE POSSIBILITY OF RESTORING THE CLIMATE FOR A NEGOATIATED POLITICAL CHANGE. THE QUESTION

IS WHETHER SOMOZA'S HEALTH AND DISPOSITION CAN TAKE MUCH MORE PRESSURE.
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